

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Cleveland Museum of Art Displays its Superb Woodcuts

CLEVELAND (Aug. 7, 2003) — The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) will present the first comprehensive exhibition from its collection documenting the history of woodcuts and other relief prints from Europe and America between the 15th century to present day in **Against the Grain: Woodcuts from the Collection**. This exhibition will be on view **Aug. 17 to Nov. 9, 2003**. Admission to this exhibition and the museum is free.

Featuring approximately 170 woodcuts, this exhibition will also include a selection of wood engravings and linocuts by such artists as Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528), Paul Gauguin (French 1848–1903), Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954), Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Roy Lichtenstein (American, 1923–1997) and Chuck Close (American, born 1940).

Similar to most museums, the CMA's prints are kept in storage because exposure to light could discolor white paper and fade the color. However, the collection is accessible to individual visitors and classes by scheduling an appointment with the prints and drawings department. Jane Glaubinger, curator of prints, says, "This exhibition is a rare opportunity to see some of our printed treasures. The museum's impressions of woodcuts like Jacopo de Barbari's *Birds-Eye View of Venice* (1500) or Titian's *The Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea* (1514–15) are each one of the few superb examples of these works extant."

This exhibition traces the development of printing carved woodblocks on paper in Europe and America. Woodcuts are the oldest printmaking medium in the West. The Chinese invented both printing from carved woodblocks and papermaking. However, it took until 1420 for Europeans to print woodblocks onto paper. To make a woodcut, a block of softwood is sawed lengthwise along the grain and planed down until smooth. The artist draws the design on the surface of the woodblock or a drawing can be glued onto the surface of the block. The "negative" areas surrounding the lines of the drawing are cut away, leaving only the parts of the design to be printed. Ink is applied to the uncut surface, which stands in relief, and a sheet of paper is put on the block. Either a printing press is used or pressure can be applied to the back of the paper to transfer the ink to the sheet. Printing reverses the design.

Woodblock prints were first produced in Europe in the early 15th century and were printed in black ink and colored by hand with watercolor, sometimes using stencils. Simple, direct images were made by anonymous craftsmen and sold at pilgrimage sites and fairs. Although some of these early woodcuts were secular, like playing cards, most had religious subjects and were meant for the spiritual enlightenment of a mostly illiterate public. They were pasted onto altarpieces and walls for personal devotion or were sewn into clothing and placed in books and on other personal objects as amulets. Since they were inexpensive and abundant, few have survived. A woodcut like the *Pietà* (German, ca. 1435–50), a single image of Mary holding the body of Christ on a full sheet of paper, is exceedingly rare.

In the late 1490s, Albrecht Dürer decided to make a living primarily from prints rather than paintings and so, raised the artistic level and status of the woodcut. Influenced by the Italian Renaissance, he gave figures a sculptural monumentality and

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devised dynamic compositions with expressive figures in convincing spatial constructions. His success was not only due to his originality, but also to the fact that Nuremberg was one of the largest and most prosperous cities in Europe. His woodcut of 1515, *The Rhinoceros* records the arrival of the first rhinoceros to reach Europe alive since the third century AD.

German artist Hans Burgkmair (1473–1531) created the chiaroscuro woodcut in 1508. For *Equestrian Portrait of the Emperor Maximilian* (1508), Burgkmair printed the black outline and white highlights on paper washed in blue. However, the next print that he made is a true chiaroscuro woodcut where he printed the outline of the image in black, using another block to print tone, leaving unprinted areas of white paper that act as highlights.

During the next two centuries, many printmaking techniques eclipsed woodcut, but the medium experienced a revival in 19th-century France. From the early 1860s, Japanese color woodcuts (*ukiyo-e* prints) had a tremendous impact on French and American artists who emulated the flattened pictorial space, dramatic points of view and surface patterns. Traditionally, craftsmen carved the woodblock after an artist's drawing. Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903) experimented by extensively carving the block himself with an unprecedented boldness and vigor as shown in *Eve* (1898–99).

Gauguin's spontaneous approach was continued by the German Expressionists early in the 20th century, who also cut and chiseled the block with expressive energy. Emil Nolde (German, 1876–1956), like Erich Heckel (German, 1883–1970) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (German, 1880–1938), emphasized subjective personal experience, originality and immediacy. Their woodcuts appear to be crude and artless but are of unprecedented inventiveness. For the first time, prints looked like the direct product of the artist's hand.

The Modern Woodcut

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973) began to make linocuts in 1951. Instead of using a separate block for each color, he used a single block to print all of the colors, chiseling out more of the block as each color was printed. *Still Life Under a Lamp* (1962) was made this way. He first printed the uncut block in white on 80 sheets of paper (the edition was 50 but some sheets would be ruined in the printing process) because the colors were printed more boldly over a layer of clear ink. Then the few areas that were to remain white were cut away and the surface of the block was layered in yellow ink and printed. Next, the areas to remain yellow were cut away, the block was layered in red and was printed over the yellow. The green and black were added in this way as well. If a mistake was made at the end of the process, the entire edition was ruined. Chuck Close (American, born 1940) adopted Picasso's reductive method for *Lucas* (1988). Artists continue to create woodcuts. Since no special equipment is needed, it is an economical and accessible printmaking method that serves a great range of aesthetic ideas.

The Cleveland Museum of Art receives operating support from the Ohio Arts Council and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The Cleveland Museum of Art is one of America's leading comprehensive museums. Its permanent collection is world renowned for its quality and breadth, spanning 6,000 years. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and art acquisitions. For more information on the museum, its holdings, programs, services and events, call 1-888-CMA-0033 or visit www.ClevelandArt.org.